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United States Senate

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June 26, 1998

The Honorable Carol M. Browner
Administrator
Environmental Protection Agency
401 M Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20460

Dear Administrator Browner:

I am forwarding you a letter from the La Puente Valley County Water District in California. The Water District has concerns about drinking water contamination by the chemical perchlorate.

It would be greatly appreciated if you could look into this matter and respond to the Water District directly. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,



Barbara Boxer
United States Senator

BB:sd



UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY

REGION IX

75 Hawthorne Street

San Francisco, CA 94105-3901

January 11, 1999

Mr. Michael Berlien
General Manager, La Puente Valley County Water District
P.O. Box 3136
La Puente, CA 91744

Dear Mr. Berlien:

Thank you for your letter of April 15, 1998 to Senator Barbara Boxer describing the problems that the La Puente Valley County Water District has faced since the discovery of perchlorate, N-nitrosodimethylamine (NDMA), and other contaminants in its groundwater supply. The Senator, in a letter dated June 26, 1998, requested that we respond directly to you. We recognize that the District has been among those hardest hit by contamination in the San Gabriel Valley, that the District has been forced to purchase water from neighboring water utilities, that customers have seen their water rates increase substantially, and that the District has borne the expense of treatment with little or no outside financial assistance.

I apologize for the delay in responding. My staff thought it best to wait to determine the outcome of discussions that began in August between EPA, the Watermaster, and the Potentially Responsible Parties about several issues relevant to the District. In your letter, you request that EPA provide financial support to those affected by the contamination and promptly pursue legal action against the parties responsible for the contamination.

We cannot offer direct financial assistance to the District, but we are trying to help in several ways. First, as you may know, EPA has adopted a groundwater cleanup plan for the Azusa-Irwindale-Baldwin Park area that calls for the large-scale extraction and treatment of contaminated groundwater. Construction and operation of the treatment systems called for in EPA's cleanup plan will, at a minimum, prevent higher levels of contamination from reaching the District's wells and will over time reduce the levels of contamination in water pumped from the District's wells. The cleanup plan calls for pumping approximately 30,000 acre-feet of contaminated groundwater per year. Depending on the outcome of current negotiations between EPA, the Potentially Responsible Parties, and the Watermaster, EPA's plan may also help in a more direct way. We expect that current negotiations will lead to an agreement on how much of the treated groundwater will be supplied to local utilities such as the District. Although there has been much discussion of efforts to export the treated water out of the San Gabriel Basin, we believe that any portion of the treated water needed locally should be made available to affected water purveyors.

Second, EPA is pursuing legal action against the parties responsible for the contamination. EPA has identified 19 parties that we believe are legally responsible for cleaning up the groundwater contamination, a majority of which have organized themselves into a group known

as the Baldwin Park Operable Unit Steering Committee. We intend to negotiate an agreement with the Steering Committee this year or, if negotiations are unsuccessful, use the Superfund trust fund to begin implementation of the project and pursue litigation against the PRPs. We had originally expected to negotiate an agreement by 1996, but complexities resulting from the "Consensus Approach" water distribution plan, and the discovery of perchlorate and NDMA, have delayed negotiations until this year.

Third, we have overseen efforts by the Steering Committee to develop a biological treatment process for removal of perchlorate from water, and facilitated the Steering Committee's financial contribution to ongoing studies of ion exchange processes by the Main San Gabriel Basin Watermaster. As you may know, EPA has also been working with the Steering Committee to construct a 500 gallon per minute biological treatment facility for removal of perchlorate at your wellfield.

In the last year, my staff tell me that they have met periodically with you to discuss ways in which EPA and the District can work jointly to clean up the groundwater contamination in the Baldwin Park area and meet the District's water supply needs. We see no conflict between pumping at the District's wells and EPA's cleanup objectives for the Baldwin Park Operable Unit (BPOU), and believe that pumping at the District's wells will help limit downgradient movement of the contaminated groundwater.

If we can provide any further assistance, please contact Wayne Praskins of my staff at (415) 744-2256.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Kemmerer", written over a horizontal line.

John Kemmerer, Chief
Superfund Site Clean Up Branch

cc: Senator Barbara Boxer